



National Press Club Address
Remarks as prepared for delivery

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Thank you so much for having me.

Ten years ago, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and in the blink of an eye, everything changed.

1800 of our brothers and sisters killed, 1 million displaced, 1 million homes damaged 250,000 were destroyed, communities torn apart and scattered to the winds.

In New Orleans, the federal levees broke, an infrastructure/man-made failure of epic proportions that resulted in floodwaters surging over the rooftops of a great American city. 80% of our city under water, \$150 billion in damages.

In a moment, everything was gone – homes, roads, schools, hospitals, police and fire stations, grocery stores, parks, playgrounds. Our lives as we knew them, gone. And as the floodwaters swallowed our neighborhoods it became a life or death struggle for thousands who were stuck in our city. The stories are seared into our souls forever.

The rushing flood pulling people under; survivors trapped for days, with little or no help. Hundreds on rooftops. People trying to keep their heads above the water. The blazing Louisiana sun, American citizens crowded in front of the Superdome; and huddled masses at the Convention Center/more stranded at the Port of St. Bernard. Floating, bloated dead bodies on the streets of America. Our nation sat, jaw dropped, gaping at the images, considering the possibility that an entire city could be gone, and wondering how in the world this happened in our beloved country.

But in the midst of all the death and destruction, something else happened. The sun came up.

And in the hours, days and weeks that followed another 'flood' came. This time it was a torrent of people. Louisiana State Wildlife and Fisheries and the US Coast Guard with our friends and neighbors pulled thousands of people out of the water. At their side, the Cajun Armada - a small navy of private vessels - fishermen from across coastal Louisiana and recreational boaters of all kinds saving lives on the flooded streets of New Orleans. And backing them up, a whole legion of people coming from everywhere.

In came the National Guard and military along with police, fire, medics and other relief volunteers from coast to coast. Within days, the Canadian Mounties had boots on the ground in the small city of Gretna. Israeli relief workers followed and countries from Australia to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates gave millions and sent supplies. The Red Cross, Second Harvest, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, United Way, Habitat for Humanity, and so many others united by faith and civic purpose rushed to our side.

Together, we started to clean up, sweating in the heat, clearing away the devastation and putting our lives back together. Together, crying over family photos that somehow escaped the deluge.

Together, sleeping on church floors and in tents. A mostly still dark city lit up by camp fires – mid-west and northeastern accents blending with southern drawl. From sea to shining sea... Americans helping Americans; citizens helping citizens; neighbors lifting up neighbors.

It was the teacher in Baton Rouge showing kindness to a scared child on her first ever day of school outside of her city New Orleans. A nurse in Atlanta who helped an evacuee get their medication.

A landlord in Shreveport who found places for families to stay. As former Houston Mayor Bill White said “People saw this as an opportunity for us to do something that was right for our country as well as for our fellow Americans.” It was one of our country’s darkest moments, but we found salvation, light and hope from the angels among us.

Those angels made real for us the Psalm of David: that joy cometh in the morning.

So, now, as we approach the 10 year anniversary of Katrina we want to remember all of those lost.

And we want to again count our blessings and again say thank you to those who helped us survive.

Over the last ten years, New Orleans has been through hell and high water, not just Katrina, but Hurricanes Rita, Ike, Gustav, Isaac, the BP oil spill, the national recession, all of it. But we won’t bow down, because we don’t know how. By our nature, we’re a resilient, hopeful people. In fact, even after all we’ve been through, a recent poll of New Orleans residents done by the Kaiser Family Foundation with NPR found that a whopping 78% of residents are optimistic about New Orleans' future.

So, New Orleans has gone from being literally being underwater to being one of the fastest growing major cities in America, with thousands of new jobs, new industries, rapidly improving schools, rising property values, and a new, stronger flood protection that will reduce the risk from hurricanes.

Our city has stood back up and this comeback is one of the world’s most remarkable stories of tragedy and triumph, resurrection and redemption. In one word RESILIENCE. We are America’s comeback city.

In New Orleans, necessity really is the mother of invention and after Katrina, it was do or die. The storm laid down the gauntlet and with huge tragedy came huge responsibility to make it right.

During Katrina, many died, and for many more the storm was a near death experience. It changed us and those who have endured such pain will tell you - when everything is slipping away, the natural instinct is to tighten your grip on what used to be secure, struggling to hold on to what was.

But the people of New Orleans took up the challenge that fate had laid at our feet, resolving to not just rebuild the city that we once were, but to create the city we always dreamed she could be.

To do it, we've had to fight through the agony that comes with disaster and change. There is no doubt, our progress has been anything but a straight line and lord knows we have a long, long way to go. After all, the storm didn't create all our problems. Our issues are generations in the making and are shared by every other part of America.

But after Katrina, I've often told an old Cajun Boudreaux and Thibodaux joke my Dad used to tell.

Boudreaux and Thibodaux got a pilot to fly them to Canada to hunt moose. They managed to bag six. As they were loading the plane to return, the pilot said the plane could take only four moose.

Of course, they objected strongly. "Last year we shot six and the pilot let us take 'em all in that same plane as yours." Reluctantly, the pilot gave in and all six were loaded. But even on full power, the little plane couldn't handle the load and went down. Miraculously, Thibodaux and Boudreaux survived the crash. Lying in the wreckage, Boudreaux turned to Thibodaux, and asked, "Any idea where we are?" Thibodaux replied, "I think we're pretty close to the place we crashed last year."

The point is obvious and was especially clear after Katrina - if we continued to do the same thing over and over again; we could expect the same outcomes. So, after years of angst, after years of fits and starts, we made the decision to change, and what has emerged on the other side is the premier example of urban innovation in America. Because we had to, New Orleans has taken on the toughest of challenges, showing the whole nation what it takes to make progress. Forever proving that there are new solutions to our age old problems.

For example, 10 years ago, New Orleans schools were considered some of the worst in the country. 2/3rds of our kids were in failing schools. Now, we have moved past what was a broken, top down system and have created a new way defined by choice, equity, and accountability. I hope we can join together to celebrate the remarkable progress that has been made for our kids. I want to thank all of our parents, students, teachers and administrators, both those from New Orleans and those who moved here more recently. They have worked tirelessly on behalf of our kids.

Today, nearly every student attends a public charter school and families who used to have only one choice for their kids can now apply to nearly every school in the city. In New Orleans, geography no longer defines a kid's destiny and we've raised the bar across the board, insisting that schools serve every child because in New Orleans we know that every child can learn and every child has the right to a great education. In addition, we said our kids need clean, healthy, safe school buildings. So now, \$1.8 billion of federal funds is being invested to rebuild, renovate or refurbish nearly every school in the city. That means outstanding new 21st century learning spaces that can help our kids thrive and realize their huge God given potential.

Before Katrina, the achievement gap between the kids in New Orleans and the kids in the rest of the state was over 25 points. Now that gap has been nearly closed. Before Katrina, the graduation rate hovered around 50 percent. Now, 73% of our kids are graduating on time – fewer kids dropping out, more kids enrolling in college. All told, this year hundreds of New Orleans seniors earned over \$75 million in scholarships at over 300 different colleges and universities.

One of these New Orleans high school graduates is Jairron. A few years ago, he wasn't going to pass the 10th grade let alone go to college. His mom and dad had sold drugs and both went to prison. As you can imagine, he struggled, but then enrolled in a charter school with a special focus on college. This made all the difference in his life and in ours. As Jairron said: "In life you have two choices, to be defeated or to conquer. I choose to conquer."

This fall Jairron will be a freshman at Morehouse College. Big time shout out for this great historically black college, which in 2015 graduated nearly 400 new 'men of Morehouse'; new leaders for our great nation. Go Maroon Tigers!

Jairron's story is inspiring and is just one example of the very real impact of our new system of schools. However, that is not to say that we are anywhere close to perfect. Anyone can see there is still a long way to go, but we are improving faster than anywhere else in America.

Besides schools, we've tackled improving the health care delivery system as well. 10 years ago, if a kid got an ear ache that meant his Mom had to spend 13 hours at the Charity Hospital emergency room just to get it checked out. Now, in New Orleans we say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and a network of neighborhood health clinics initially funded by a federal grant after Katrina have endured. I am so happy to see one of the principle architects of this new system is with us today – Dr. Karen DeSalvo, former New Orleans Health Commissioner and now President Obama's Acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services. Because of her hard work and the hard work of so many others, today at New Orleans' St. Thomas Community Health Center, prevention is the name of the game. Soup to nuts health care in the neighborhood: everything from chronic disease management to pediatrics with a special

focus on women's health. That means thousands of mammograms done every year at St. Thomas - lives being saved through prevention.

All told, neighborhood health centers like St. Thomas serve 59,000 patients across the region every year who otherwise would get much more expensive health care at emergency rooms.

Add this to billions being invested for 2 world class hospitals right in the heart of New Orleans.

One for our veterans at the new VA hospital and the other will be our new University Medical Center.

For generations to come; our honored veteran warriors and many more will get the care they need and deserve. Taken altogether, ours is a real model for the rest of the country. It works.

10 years ago, Katrina was the last straw which broke the back of an economy that had been struggling for 40 years. Now, we are creating thousands of new jobs and spurring on promising new industries like water management, digital media and bioscience. Plus, world class companies like GE Capital and Gameloft are expanding here. But we can't leave anyone behind. We have to create a pathway to prosperity that anyone can follow. So, in New Orleans we help entrepreneurs like Burnell Cotlon, a young man with a dream to open his own business, a grocery store in the Lower Ninth Ward. He got support from the city and now he has done it, Galvez Goodies on Caffin Street. This is the exact spot where 12 feet of water sat for weeks following the levee breach. And at our hub for entrepreneurs called Idea Village, a new, vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem has emerged where talented people can get the training and support they need to turn big ideas into new businesses with new jobs.

Plus, in New Orleans we are in the midst of a retail and restaurant building boom. No other place in the world would lose 100,000 people, but gain about 600 more restaurants than we had before Katrina. Only in New Orleans.

These businesses are opening in thriving neighborhoods where on top of new private investment, more than \$1 billion in affordable public housing is either available or coming online - 14,430 affordable rental units for low income families. New Orleans' notorious old 'big four' public housing developments were run down and they were dangerous. They did not give the people of New Orleans what they needed or what they deserved. So we have converted this public housing into mixed-income communities with amenities like schools, health care and transit. We can see this shift at the former St. Bernard Development, now known as Columbia Parc. The St. Bernard was one of the old public housing developments first built by the Roosevelt Administration during the depression.

Over the years, it had fallen on hard times and by the time Katrina hit, 25% of the 1300 units were empty and the area was known for its violence. And then the levees broke

and as the sun rose the day after the storm passed, the St. Bernard development was ten feet under-water. Like with everything else, we resolved to build back the St. Bernard not as it once was, but like it always should have been. Now, Columbia Parc is a world-class example of mixed income public housing that embraces public-private partnerships and true place based development. The master plan for the neighborhood includes newly built schools, an early childhood learning center, a recreation facility, library, playgrounds, retail, and green space.

Plus, now crime is way down at Columbia Parc. In fact, since Katrina we've made tremendous progress city-wide on crime reduction. This is good. But when I took office, our murder rate still led the nation. Now, through our comprehensive murder reduction strategy NOLA FOR LIFE we've changed our approach and put a special focus on prevention paired with tough enforcement. Last year, New Orleans hit a 43 year low for murder, but we still have a long way to go. This year unfortunately, across the nation and in New Orleans murder is ticking up. And with nearly 15,000 Americans lost every year to murder in this nation, a disproportionate number young African American men; it is clear that this crisis goes well beyond New Orleans. It is a national disgrace and a moral outrage that so many people are killed on the streets of America every day. Stopping murder should be a national priority. Black lives DO matter. We should act like it.

But of course, across the board, fighting crime and preventing murder is just one part of the criminal justice system.

10 years ago, when Katrina hit there were about 6000 inmates in Orleans Parish Prison; it was a prime example of mass incarceration at its worst. We were the most incarcerated city, in the most incarcerated state in the most incarcerated country in the world. Now, we are pushing back against mass incarceration like nowhere else in the country. We have cut our daily prison population down to about 1,800 inmates. That is a 2/3rd reduction. We have sought to be tough and smart on crime at the same time. Lock up the violent bad guys who threaten everybody, but make fewer unnecessary arrests, provide alternatives to incarceration, pretrial services, improve case processing times, and create wrap around services for those citizens returning home, so they don't go back. There must be justice, there must be peace. Black lives matter whether they are being lost to shootings or to years in prison.

We're also making tremendous progress on combating homelessness. In the years after the storm, New Orleans had over 11,600 people living without a home. Now, we are at just over 1,700 and this year became the first city in America to functionally end veteran homelessness.

Finally and importantly, New Orleans has become a global leader in emergency preparedness. Ten years ago, none of us were prepared for a storm like Katrina and we suffered the terrible consequences. Now, everyone is on the same page and our preparations are both wide and deep.

In partnership with a local non-profit called Evacuteer, we developed the City-Assisted Evacuation Plan. Now, during a mandatory evacuation, local, state and federal officials along with faith and community based organizations are seamlessly coordinated. We provide transportation to residents and tourists unable to self-evacuate and have an extensive special needs registry so we can take care of the bedridden and the sick.

But since Katrina we've had a broader cultural shift and now emergency preparedness has become engrained in our daily lives. If you drive around New Orleans you will see 16 large public art displays scattered around the city. We call these landmarks 'Evacuspots' which will serve as gathering sites during an evacuation. These are physical symbols of our preparedness. And there are other physical manifestations of our continued renaissance; \$1.63 billion being invested to reinvigorate neighborhoods with new roads, parks, playgrounds and community centers. Plus, another \$320 million for public transit infrastructure and we're about to break ground on our new airport.

New Orleans is on a roll and like 78% of our residents I am optimistic about the future, but we have big time unfinished business and just like throughout the last ten years our ongoing and future efforts will be supported by our partners. One of these key partnerships is with the Rockefeller Foundation.

Through Rockefeller's 100 Resilient Cities Initiative, next week we will unveil a new long-term resilience strategy that by 2018 will ensure New Orleans is a global model for resilience for the 21st century.

We're already on our way with new modern infrastructure and levees. With the BP oil spill settlement and new federal/state revenue sharing taking effect, we finally have a partial payment on hardening key assets and rebuilding the coast. And most of the rest of the money should come from oil companies. They helped break it and they need to help fix it. And really all Americans have a stake in the future of our coast, because contrary to popular belief, gas does not come from the pump. It comes from us, and every year the Gulf Coast via Louisiana provides America with more oil and gas than we import from Saudi Arabia. We are the tip of the spear when it comes to energy independence and as we protect Louisiana's coast we really protect America.

But to be truly resilient, we can't just build up levees against storms, or just change how we live with water or protect our wetlands. We need to do all those things, but to be truly resilient as a society means combating other chronic stresses like poverty, inequality, violence, and racism. To be truly resilient we must go deeper and create a city that can adapt and thrive no matter what might happen with climate change or the global economy. That means government with a regional mindset which can both respond to a shock like a hurricane and prepare our people for the future. That means a 21st century education system and broad based economic growth so there is a pathway to prosperity anyone can follow and no one is left behind. That means being inclusive of everyone in the community - breaking down the walls that divide us and coming together in unity.

Our goal is nothing less than to create a city of peace, opportunity and responsibility for all people - a city for the ages. We're not there yet and are far from perfect, but the

people of New Orleans are committed to their city and know we are on the right path. Indeed, this is what we do as Americans – work hard and dream of something more, something better.

We should always remember our history and remember how far we as a people have come. In 1776, the aspirational words found in our Declaration of Independence, that all men are created equal, certainly rang hollow to many and must have been especially ironic to the slave. For them, neither liberty nor equality were in reach. Through more than two centuries of tumultuous change we have made progress in a million ways.

But still, this is the big message the nation should take away from what we saw ten years ago at the Superdome and the more recent unrest on the streets of Baltimore and Ferguson. We still fall short; we still have not fulfilled the promise of being 'one nation', 'indivisible with liberty and justice for all.' But we can get there.

So, as we turn the corner on the tenth anniversary of Katrina and now look forward towards New Orleans' 300th anniversary as a city in 2018, our challenge is to continue moving forward because we have a long way to go. But it is critical to understand where we are in the broader context: sitting at the deepest of the deep South states, once this nation's backwater. That backwater has changed and now New Orleans is a beacon of light, the capital of what some have called 'the new south'.

So, I believe the south will rise again, but not the old south. The old south of slavery, civil war, confederate flags and monuments, 'separate but equal', and 'you go your way and I'll go mine' is gone. The New South led by New Orleans is a place where diversity is our greatest strength, not a weakness. Where our collective wisdom and energy is combined to produce something that will benefit everyone; A place that understands the totality of our history and the importance of culture, family, faith, and friends; A place which combines old and new into something truly special that people want to be a part of; A place that understands what it means to come together in unity and wrestle with the good, the bad and everything in between.

And at the mouth of that mighty Mississippi we in New Orleans lie at the heart of this struggle. We have shown what is possible. That from the worst disaster there can be rebirth. Out of despair, there can be hope. Out of darkness, light. Out of destruction, beauty. Hope must spring eternal, faith the motivator when all seems lost. Faith in our strength to change. And with your help, we have changed.

So on behalf of the people of New Orleans, I say thank you. Thank you to the American tax payer. Thank you to the federal government. Thank you to President Obama, Presidents Bush 41 and 43, President Clinton, and President Carter. Thank you for your support and for your prayers when we needed them most. Thank you for caring for us during our time of need. Thank you for your donations and your support. Thank you for caring about the city that care forgot. We are unbowed. We are unbroken. We will press on. One step at a time. One team, one fight, one voice, one city. One United States of America.